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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

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U. S. Department of Agriculture
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Subject: "Duck Season News." Information from the Bureau of Biological Survey,
U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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We human beings are not the only ones who have been up against hard times these last few years. And our farm families are not the only families that have suffered from the drought. In fact, our troubles are mild compared to those of some other native Americans -- the wild ducks and other much prized game birds of this continent. This dry year has been the worst in history for them and it has come on top of a series of hard years during which our waterfowl population has been rapidly decreasing. Hunters killed more birds than hatched last year. And when the survivors fly South this fall, they will find thousands of ponds and lakes dried up where always before they could rest and feed. So they will have to concentrate on whatever water they can find and will be in much more danger from hunters. You see, our ducks have been suffering not only from the man behind the gun -- and records show that there are now about two or three million duck hunters in this country -- but they're also up against famine, lack of water and nesting places, disease and bird and beast enemies. And they haven't any FERA or housing committees or CCC camps to turn to for food, homes and protection for their young. The Bureau of Biological Survey and other organizations interested in saving these fine birds from complete destruction are doing what they can. But your husband or son or your best beau who is going duck-shooting this fall can help, too -- he needs to know the situation and understand and be sympathetic with the new regulations the Government has made this year.

In the old pioneer days hunters didn't have to wait for open seasons or bother about hunting licenses. Every day was an open season. Game was plentiful enough for everyone the year around. And the housewife could plan her meals around the wild turkey her husband brought in, or the prairie chicken or wild duck. Hunters didn't have very good guns in those days and game reproduced more rapidly than they could take it.

But since the day of the modern repeater and high-powered ammunition, the automobile, and the motor boat, and since the number of hunters has increased so tremendously, we no longer have anywhere near enough game to go around. This is the reason for limiting not only the shooting season but also the bag.

We Americans have been very careless with our game just as we have been with our rivers and forests and other natural resources. In our haste to get rich, we've drained so much water off the land in the North Central States that during the past summer we've been shooting domestic cattle for lack of water instead of

ducks right on that old prairie marsh land and those drained lake beds. Well, the Government is now trying to remedy that by restoring our marshes and lakes. And government experts are trying to save the remaining wild ducks by restrictive measures, short seasons and small bag limits, regulating and controlling shooting on baited grounds and so on. They also have the problem of bringing back the nesting areas while we still have some ducks left to nest.

The ducks seem to have had the original idea of the little grey home in the West. They may spend the winter in the East, but most of them nest on the other side of the Mississippi, right in those states that were so badly hit by drought this year. At present, about 75 to 80 percent of the ducks of North America are raised in Canada.

From the sandhill lakes in Nebraska, north to the Canadian line, west as far as Montana, east to the Erie marshes was once an almost unbroken series of fine nesting grounds. Iowa, too, and Illinois and Indiana produced many ducks. And on the Pacific slope, Oregon's Lake Malheur and Lower Klamath alone probably hatches each year more migratory waterfowl than nest in the whole United States this year. These two reservoirs were once the chief source of the great Pacific Coast Flight. Today they're as dry as a boneyard. Draining marshes to make more plowed fields and robbing lands to irrigate the deserts have done for seventeen million acres of once prolific land in our country.

So the Government this year is spending eight and a half million dollars to pay back and reflood some of these old duck-nesting grounds and at the same time relieve the farmers stranded on these dried-up lands and make work for the unemployed. But while they're rebuilding the old nesting grounds, sportsmen should be interested enough not to kill so many ducks that there'll be none left to nest when their old homes are restored.

Government scientists have been working to help the wild duck and his relatives in other ways also. They have studied the curious plague of recent years called "duck disease" which has killed so many of our waterfowl. They have found out that this disease is a food poisoning coming from spoilage bacteria known as botulismus, the ^{some} type of germ that is sometimes found in improperly canned food and is so fatal to human beings. Ducks that ate decaying organic matter in shallow stagnant pools are the ones who were poisoned this way.

We lose many of our ducks while they are babies. The high infant mortality is largely the result of all those birds and animals who prey on the helpless ducklings in or out of the nest. Coyotes enjoy tender duckling for dinner, and so do the snapping turtles.

Well, this is only a hasty glimpse into the duck situation. But if you want more information, you can always write the Bureau of Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Washington, D. C.

